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RUEHC/DEPT OF LABOR WASHDC  
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHINGTON DC  
RUCPDOG/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIJING 001322

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STATE FOR USTR-KARESH, ROSENBERG, STRATFORD, CELICO  
JUSTICE FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS - KYLE LATIMER  
JUSTICE FOR OPDAT - CHRISTOPHER LEHMAN AND MICHELLE CRAWFORD  
DHS FOR IMMIGRATION AND CUSTOMS ENFORCEMENT  
COMMERCE FOR 4420/ITA/MAC/MCQUEEN AND DAS KASOFF  
LABOR FOR OSEC AND ILAB  
TREASURY FOR OASIA/ISA-CUSHMAN  
GENEVA FOR CHAMBERLIN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/05/2032

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [KJUS](#) [ELAB](#) [PGOV](#) [ETRD](#) [CH](#)

SUBJECT: TWO FORMER PRISONERS DESCRIBE PRISON LABOR  
CONDITIONS

Classified By: Econmincouns Robert Luke, reason 1.4(b/d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Two former prison inmates recently discussed their prison labor experiences with Laboff. Although at completely different prisons, their accounts were similar. Both reported that labor was involuntary, and consisted of light industrial work for private companies that made outsourcing arrangements with the prison. Although the private companies paid the prisons for labor, the amounts were below local minimum wage standards, and little or none of the money went to the inmates. Both prisoners described prison and working conditions as poor, unsanitary and abusive. Most of the facilities in which these two prisoners served time required prisoners to work longer hours than permitted by Chinese overtime laws. One of the former prisoners described packaging some goods for export, but saw now evidence of goods being made for export to the United States. End summary.

¶2. (C) Two former Chinese prison inmates described working conditions in their respective prison facilities in separate meetings with Laboff. Both former prisoners are contacts of Embassy's human rights officers, who have followed their cases since their arrests. Both were released in 2006, and agreed to Laboff's request to discuss prison labor conditions. Ms. Zheng Mingfeng, who was arrested in 2003 for her involvement in protests over land confiscations, was released in January 2006 and met with Laboff on December 19, ¶2006. She was incarcerated from October 2003 to September 2006 in three correctional facilities in Tianjin, including the Tianjin Municipal No. 1 Detention Center, the Tianjin Ji County Detention Center, and the Tianjin Women,s Prison. Xu Yonghai, arrested for his efforts to publicize abuses of religious rights in Hangzhou in 2003, met with Laboff on January 23, 2007. Xu was incarcerated from October 2003 to January 2006 at three sites, first a detention center in Beijing, then the Hangzhou Xiaoshan District detention center, and finally at the Hangzhou Xijiao prison. Both Zheng and Xu served their sentences in standard correctional facilities with common criminals, not in reeducation through labor (RTL) facilities. There are strong similarities

between their accounts of prison life and prison labor conditions.

#### Involuntary Labor, Negligible Compensation

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13. (C) Zheng said she performed involuntary, uncompensated labor in all three facilities in which she was incarcerated. Zheng reported that workers were unpaid, workplaces were unsanitary (even when used for handling food or medical supplies), that ill prisoners were required to work, and that prisoners, families were charged for any materials the prisoners damaged during their work. Zheng said prisons made outsourcing arrangements with local private businesses, which would set up workshops on site. She reported that these businesses paid the prison 400 RMB per month for each prison laborer, none of which was given to the prisoner. (The current minimum wage in Tianjin is RMB 670 per month). Though she did receive occasional small cash stipends from the prison, Zheng said she mainly depended on cash from her family to pay for basic necessities like toothpaste and toilet paper, and that prices in the prison were far higher than on the outside. She said when prisoners were transferred from one prison to another, the receiving prison paid the sending prison RMB 800 (US\$ 100) &per head.8

14. (C) Xu said he performed involuntary labor at both the detention center and prison in Hangzhou. Xu spent most of his sentence sewing umbrellas together, and said he learned that the prison received RMB 0.40 per umbrella (0.5 US cents -- \$3.00 at 60 umbrellas per day). This money was not distributed to workers, but workers did receive between 10-50 RMB (US\$ 1.30 -6.50) per month to purchase basic necessities

BEIJING 00001322 002 OF 003

like toothpaste and toilet paper. (The current minimum wage in Hangzhou is RMB 650 per month, although some districts are free to set their own, lower standards.) Prices of goods in prison, he said, were roughly the same as outside. All prisoners were required to work, Xu said, and those who were too sick to work only received 7 RMB (less than US\$ 1) per month. Workers were "fined" RMB 5 if they damaged an umbrella. If prisoners families could not pay, the prisoner would be beaten.

The work they did

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15. (C) Zheng said the types of work she did varied, including making artificial flowers (Zheng claimed that all fake flowers in China are made in prisons), making baskets for use in aquiculture, packaging ointments and skin plasters, packaging foodstuffs (melon seeds, chocolate bars, powdered milk), condoms and crayons, and sewing and packaging sweaters, coats and western-style suits. Zheng believes some goods produced at the Tianjin Municipal No. 1 Detention Center were meant for export, but she did not know of any exports to the United States. Zheng said milk powder packaged as "Nestle" and "Yi Li" (a well-known Chinese brand) products were packed for export to South Africa, Paraguay and Uruguay. At one point her prison manufactured "Crocodile of Italy" sweaters for export to Korea (labeled in Korean). She described packaging ointments and skin plasters in boxes listing their place of manufacture as Japan. She said the prison packaged the same ointments and skin plasters under several different brands. Manufacturing addresses on some of the medicine packages said Tianjin Municipality Century Biological Products LLC.

16. (C) Xu reported that both the detention center and the prison in Hangzhou contracted work for the same company, the Tian Tang (heaven) Umbrella Company, which makes umbrellas under the Tian Tang, Su Hang (Suzhou-Hangzhou) and Pingguo (Apple) brands. Xu said most of the work he did was sewing umbrella cloth to umbrella frames. Other prison workshops made the umbrella frame components, and also did some work on

raincoats for the same company. Some prisoners did processing work on sweaters. One of the detention centers made Christmas lights (brand unknown). Xu did not know whether the umbrellas were exported or not, and did not recall seeing "made in China" labels.

#### Work and prison conditions

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17. (C) Zheng complained of long hours at both the detention center and prisons in Tianjin. She said prisoners typically worked from 6:00 a.m. until their daily production quotas were completed, often 1:00 or 2:00 am the following day. Xu said prisoners at the Hangzhou Xiaoshan District Detention Center worked in the same cells they slept in. They got up at 6:00 a.m. and began work at 6:15 a.m. Working hours lasted until 7-8 pm, with only a few short breaks to eat. Work was seven days a week. (Chinese overtime rules limit overtime work to a total of 36 hours per month). Conditions at the Hangzhou Prison were better, Xu said. Prisoners there worked from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., and worked in a designated workshop. Work there was five days a week, but Xu said workers had a production quota, and if they did not finish it, they had to work on Saturday and/or Sunday. Xu described the production quota as achievable once workers became skilled at their jobs, but not easy. Xu said that on rare occasions there would be no work to do.

18. (C) Both Zheng and Xu reported that prisoners were supervised by other prisoners. Zheng claimed that prison shop managers paid bribes to the prison authorities in order to get their privileged positions. Xu described his prison supervisors as "prisoners who were hooligans on the outside,"

BEIJING 00001322 003 OF 003

chosen because they were willing to beat prisoners who did not work, did not meet production quotas, or damaged materials and could not pay for them. He said there were also one or two technical supervisors from the umbrella factory at the prison every day, mainly there to teach new inmates. Xu said there was a clinic at the prison where workers could get treatment if injured. It was very common for workers to jab or cut themselves. Workers did not get thimbles, eye protection, or other safety equipment.

19. (C) On prison conditions in general, Zheng said they were "not fit for dogs or pigs." At one facility, she claimed, inmates were fed cornbread made from cornmeal provided by a local pharmaceutical plant after the vitamins and starch had been extracted for sale. Families of prisoners were required to pay a one time fee of 550 RMB for food and daily necessities regardless of the prisoner's length of internment. Xu said food at the Hangzhou detention center was very basic and unsanitary, and there was not enough of it. At the Hangzhou Prison, he said, food was better, but still consisted of mainly boiled cabbage, and cornbread made from very old cornmeal. The prison only served meat a few times a year, such as national holidays, he said.

110. (C) Xu told Laboff it is good for prisoners to work to give them something to do, but that prisoners should not be exploited, or be used to undercut the price of labor on the outside. He also said his duties at the prison were lighter than those of other prisoners, which he attributed to the attention he received from the USG as a human rights interest case.

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